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has a good deal to do with it. We got back to the station with much success, owing to our young man in authority; ranks of mounted *gens d'armes* opened before the son of Signor Tommaso; ticket-men refused coin for their paste-boards; and conductors, cap in hand, showed us to the coupe of the first class, where we industriously slept until we were awakened by "Firenze, Signori."

AN ORIGINAL PAINTING BY BARON GERARD.

A Story.



GENTLEMAN writing us from St. Louis recently, called the attention of the Directory of the Association to an original painting, by the celebrated Baron Gerard, whose somewhat curious history the writer gives, together with the character of the work. We quote from the communication:

"The original picture of Pauline Bonaparte, or Princess Borghese, painted by Baron Gerard, originally belonged to Murat, her nephew, who had it some time in this country. During his stay in Florida he had some pecuniary troubles, and was obliged to authorize his steward to dispose of it by raffle. It was raffled in New Orleans about twenty years ago—the price of tickets was one hundred dollars each; Gabriel Paul, Esq., of St. Louis, purchased three, and succeeded in winning the picture. From him the undersigned purchased it about eighteen years ago. Two years afterwards he took it to London, England, and exhibited it at the Cosmorama, in Regent-street, for six months—left it in London with a friend, in whose possession it now is—having had it insured annually up to this time for the sum of one thousand pounds.

"Pauline is represented as a sleeping Psyche, attended by Cupid and a group of musical loves. Cupid is a correct likeness of herself when awake. The historical associations connected with this celebrated *chef d'œuvre* render it interesting to the connoisseur and artist, who are lost in admiration at the exquisite and refined symmetry of the figures, the contour of the limbs, the softness and delicacy of coloring,

the deep and impassioned halo thrown around the canvas, blending with art the very semblance of life; and, free from all voluptuousness, reclining in innocent repose."

This picture, we are informed, is to be sold before the 24th of June, in London. Any of our art lovers feeling an interest in the matter, can learn more by application to the office of the Association. We should suppose the present Monarch of the French would be eager to secure the work at any price; for Baron Gerard's portraits of the Emperor's family are not so numerous that the family of Napoleon can afford to spare them.

Speaking of Gerard recalls the following story, narrated by him of the Florentine artist, Carlo Pedrero. Its satire was the subject of much good humored remark at the time: It seems that a young Signor, of Florence, deeply enamored of a Signorina, ordered of Carlo a picture of Hymen. The god was to be attended with all the graces and joys; his torch was to be more brilliant than Cupid's. Price was of no consequence; let the artist do his best, and quickly; for the Signor would have the work done for a bridal present on the eve of his marriage with the beautiful Francesca. The painter surpassed himself, and brought the master-piece on the eve of the wedding-day. The young man was ill satisfied, finding the treatment far beneath the merit of the subject. The painter explained that his process in the use of colors was such as to need time to bring out their just effect; he would take away the picture, therefore, and bring it back some months later, when its beauty would have developed itself. The marriage took place the next day, and Carlo brought back his picture some months later. "Time has, indeed, embellished your work!" exclaimed the Florentine Signor; "what a difference! But it seems to me that the countenance of Hymen is too gay; you have given him a smiling air that does not belong to the character." "It is not my canvas but your sentiments that are changed," replied the artist; "a few months ago you were in love; now you are married." While the group of listeners were laughing at Gerard's story, which ended here, a gentleman took it up again, saying: "Do you know what happened afterward? The painter, content with the sum paid him,

now promised to represent Hymen in a way to please both lover and husband; and in a few months later he opened his atelier to the public for the exhibition of a masterpiece, promised perhaps imprudently. The public came, but they entered only a few at a time. The picture was hung quite at the end of a long gallery. The effect of colors was managed with an art that made the portrait of Hymen appear charming to those who *looked at it from a distance*, but, close to it, *it was not at all the same thing*." The expression and manner of the speaker added greatly to the humor of this epilogue. But what lends it its chief interest, and will excite the surprise of many, is to learn that its author was the learned Humboldt.

ART-DESECRATION OF THE CAPITOL.



IN the December *Journal* we referred to the ornamentation of the Capitol at Washington in highly complimentary terms, saying: "The aid of the best engineers, the best architects, the best builders, has not only been called into requisition, but our best sculptors, painters and designers have contributed, in their various departments, the most characteristic of their works." We are indeed sorry to be compelled to qualify this notice, for the truer statement will disappoint, if it does not anger, every reader whose patriotism has led him to hope great things from the lavish outlay of money upon our magnificent Capitol. The general architectural design and finish of the building is all that could be wished for in beauty of proportion, in adaptation, and in its imposing effect. The sculptural ornamentation is, as a general thing, highly artistic and appropriate—the genius of the lamented Crawford, of Mr. Rogers, and of other eminent sculptors, having been enlisted in the work. All this led to the most favorable anticipations regarding the interior decorations by the hands of the artists. That these expectations are to end in mortification we fear is now a certainty, unless the Senate now in session takes the work from the hands of Capt. Meigs, and orders the laborers and designs from the large number of eminent American artists who are ready to do their

best upon the great work, but who are now all set aside by an army of third-rate imported Italian painters, whose daubs are only calculated to excite derision from every person of taste and patriotism. The American artists have expressed their disgust of the whole proceedings, and forewarned the country against the desecration; and if the authorities do not interfere to stay the sacrilege, it will be for the reason that Italians and mythology are preferred to Americans and records of our national history.

From a letter published by Mr. Ertel, we learn why the American artists employed by Capt. Meigs have resigned. After referring to his treatment by Signor Brumidi, he says:

"But there is another and stronger motive actuating my present course. From the fact of *Mr. Brumidi having already appropriated to himself for decoration, ornamentation and fresco, nearly every available room in both wings of the Capitol extension, and being therein sustained by your authority and signature*, what should have been an expression of national generosity, has become a positive monopoly. This truth was not revealed to me but on compulsory search for those rooms for which nothing had been designed, and except for this circumstance I might have remained ignorant still. It would ill become me, as an American citizen, with the knowledge of these singular facts, still to persist in writing my solitary name upon the walls of the Nation's first and best building, and to remain unimpressed by sympathetic national atmosphere within its spacious halls, looking in vain around me for congenial society. Merely personal injuries I might have passed over and forgiven—to trespass myself upon national ground, I dare not."

The matter is stated more at length, and more specifically, by the following letter from Washington, of recent date, which will be perused with a feeling of indignation by the majority of our readers. The correspondent writes:

"A good deal of feeling is beginning to be manifested in Washington about the way in which the decoration of the new Capitol is going on; and I understand that the subject will be brought up before Congress in a few days, or at least before the session closes. In material, in architecture, and in size, the Capitol, in its enlarged form, is entitled to be ranked in the

first class of edifices, either ancient or modern. Rightly enough, the intention of the architect and of Congress is to have it decorated internally in a style of art correspondent with its rank and character as the foremost of American structures. To effect this, it is obvious that the paintings and the sculptures which ornament the building should be of the highest style of art attainable at the present day, and should, moreover, be designed and arranged upon some system or general plan which shall give them a historical character, and impart to the building, when complete, a peculiar value, as an embodiment in art of all that is most characteristic in our history, and in our past and present condition as a nation.

The field afforded by the Capitol is ample enough to occupy, for years to come, all our artists who are worth employing. The old hall of the Representatives, now vacant and disused, is admirably calculated for a gallery of pictures and statues, and, in fact, cannot well be put to any other use. The new buildings, throughout, have been designed with reference to decoration by painting and by sculpture; niches, panels and *fields*, as the artists call them, have been provided wherever there was possible room for them. The ceilings and the walls, not only of the principal halls, but of the corridors, lobbies and countless committee rooms, are to be covered with paintings in fresco or in oil. In the new Hall of Representatives alone there are twenty large panels, admirably designed for a series of historical pictures. And each of the truly noble and beautiful staircases in each wing affords *fields* for three large and one very large picture.

The best artists of the country, with scarcely an exception, have offered their services, and asked to be employed upon the Capitol. Without an exception their applications have been rejected, and the work of decoration is going rapidly forward under the direction of an Italian, whose reputation is little better than that of a skilful scene painter, and who employs under him a crowd of sixty or seventy foreign painters, chiefly Italians and Frenchmen. The result of their labors is now visible here and there throughout the new wings in tawdry and gaudy ornaments, vile in taste, poor in design, and offensive in color. The most flagrant and conspicuous scene of their exertions so far is the Senate Naval Committee room—an apartment about thirty feet by twenty in size.

The decorations of this one room have already cost \$10,000, and the ornamentation, such as it is, is yet far from complete. It is scarcely possible to imagine anything more absurd, or in more outrageous taste. Yet it is entirely in keeping with the general style of decoration of the Capitol, which is a servile, tasteless reproduction of the Pompeian style, with its worn-out, *fade*, wearisome gods, goddesses, nymphs, and monsters, of which all sensible, cultivated men have long been tired, and which have passed away from literature and art wherever literature and art really flourish. I know nothing that can be more exactly and appropriately compared to the decoration of the Capitol than the stock in trade of a dealer in valentines in the first half of the month of February. The venuses and cupids and donkey-headed monsters of the shopman are just as high specimens of art, and have just as much meaning and significance, as the similar classic and mythological creatures which disfigure the Capitol. Nay more. For in the valentine-shop we have no reason to look for anything better, while in the Capitol of the American people, and particularly in that part of it which dates from the middle of the nineteenth century, we might naturally expect something illustrative of the national history or character. The poverty of modern invention in architecture obliges us to borrow the external forms of our buildings from the Greeks and Italians; but there is surely no necessity, in decorating the interiors, to reproduce the cast-off absurdities of the Old World, which to us have no meaning, not even the shadow of a meaning. The plain paint and white-wash of our fathers are more respectable and even more pleasant to look upon than these tasteless imitations of obsolete rubbish.

The Naval Committee-room, which, as I have said, has already cost \$10,000, afforded, perhaps, as good an opportunity as any other room for the display of something really national and significant. Our navy has a history, and in naval architecture the country has something to show and something to be proud of as peculiar to herself in origin if not in use. The subjects indicated are many of them eminently picturesque. As connected with the settlement and history of the country, the artist could with propriety introduce almost every species of craft that sail the waters—the caravels of the Spanish dis-

coverers—the barks and pinnaces of the days of Queen Elizabeth—the Dutch galleots—the English men-of-war—our own schooners, clippers, steamboats, flat-boats and Indian canoes. Many of these are peculiarly American and suggestive in their associations. An artist of genius and invention, imbued with national ideas, would find no difficulty in introducing all of them in an appropriate and picturesque way into decorations suitable for a room devoted to naval affairs. Our warlike and our peaceful triumphs on the water, from the battles of Paul Jones to the successful race of the yacht *America*, could be thus commemorated in a fitting manner, together with every navigating characteristic of the nation, from a Hudson river raft to a Mississippi steamboat. We have plenty of marine painters, competent to the task, who would be glad to exert their powers in embellishing such a room. And, brief as the period of our history is, no people of modern times have furnished during their national existence ampler or more varied materials for the proper treatment of such a subject. How the Italian painter, to whom the job of decorating the Capitol has been committed, at so much a day, has seen fit to embellish the Naval Committee-room of the American Senate, may be comprehended by the following document, which is conspicuously posted up in the aforesaid room, for the edification of visitors :

"SENATE COMMITTEE ON NAVAL AFFAIRS.—The decorative paintings of this room are a specimen of the manner in which the ancient Greeks and Romans ornamented their splendid buildings, some of which are still extant in the precious monuments of Pompeii and the baths of Titus. America, with the sea divinities, are painted on the ceiling in real fresco. These mythological figures are delineated agreeably to the poetical descriptions we have received of them, and they are Neptune, the god of the seas, Amphitrite, his wife, Æolus keeping the winds chained to the rocks, Venus the daughter of the sea, Oceanus, with cramp-fish claws on his head, Thetis, his wife, and Nereus, the father of the Nereids, drawn by Glacus, and the Tritons by marine horses or swans, or else mounted on sea-monsters."

This is equal to the groves of Blarney, where Venus, and Nicodemus, and Nebuchadnezzar, and the other "haythen" gods and goddesses, might be seen standing naked all in the open air. It is a conception about up, or rather down, to the level of a tenth-rate artist in some obscure provincial town of Italy, where the progress of taste, as of everything else, was

a century behind the world. But what business has such vulgar and obsolete and ridiculous trash on the walls of a committee-room in the American Capitol? What have we to do with sea divinities with cramp-fish claws on their heads, or with Tritons, and Nereids, and marine horses? A representation of horse marines would be more to the purpose, and quite as significant and sensible.

The adjoining room—that of the Committee on Military Affairs—is somewhat better, inasmuch as it contains representations of the implements of modern warfare, which are appropriate enough; but it also contains two large frescoes of the battles of Lexington and Bunker Hill, badly painted, and showing at a glance that they are the work of foreigners, to whom the countenances, the costumes, and the character of the men of the men of the Revolution were not familiar. They have no nationality about them; whereas nationality is, above all things, to be desired in decorating the National Capitol.

The same foreign element prevails in all the decorations, so far as they have yet been executed. In the Agricultural Committee-room, for instance, which is one of the show-rooms, there is a picture of Cincinnatus summoned from his farm to take charge of the Roman State, and a counterpart representing Putnam receiving the news of the battle of Lexington, as he was ploughing in the field. The whole tone of the latter picture is Italian, not American. The landscape, the grouping, the attitudes, and the expression, are of the Roman Campagna, and not of Connecticut, as they should be. The foreign artist has done his best, with the aid of native pictures and engravings, to make the thing American, but he has succeeded no better than a Chinese artist succeeds in copying a Western painting. He copies with the most minute fidelity, but his work has still an inevitable strangeness of tone and feeling.

The responsibility for this defacement of the Capitol rests, I am sorry to learn, upon Captain Meigs, the engineer in charge of the Capitol extension. I have heretofore defended him in the *Tribune* from the attacks that were made upon the new Hall of Representatives. That Hall, after six months' daily observation and use of it, I maintain to be as well adapted to its purpose as any Hall well can be. For that, and for the general construction of the Capitol extension, Captain Meigs

deserves high credit. He is a man of intelligence and of unimpeachable integrity, who has most faithfully executed the important duties which have been committed to his charge. But his approbation or toleration of the montrosities under the name of Art, which are being perpetrated under his eyes, shows that he has not the taste nor the cultivation which might entitle him to absolute and unquestioned direction of the decorations of the buildings. Such direction he has assumed. Throughout the Capitol in the matter of art his will is law, and no man is suffered to touch a brush who does not conform implicitly to that will. Our native artists of distinction, with reputations at stake, will not submit to the dictation of a man who may be a good engineer, but who is certainly no artist, and who just as certainly has no taste for art. The consequence is, that the Capitol is in the hands of a crowd of inferior and needy foreigners, who paint what they are told to paint at so much a day for their work. If this is suffered to go on the Capitol will be for ages the laughing-stock of the cultivated world. Congress can and should remedy the evil by appointing a connoisseur to superintend the decoration of the public buildings.

REPRESENTATIVE CHARACTER OF AMERICAN ARTISTS.

FLORENCE, ITALY, April, 1858.

THE artists of America are here the representatives of America—its historians, champions, entire interpreters. Sculptors and painters speak a dialect which every nation alike understands. Art speaks to the world. With neither voice nor language, its sound goes out into all lands. It is Greenough, and Crawford, and Powers, and Hart, therefore, who are teaching Italy—and eastern and central Europe, through the hundreds of titled Germans and Russians who visit Florence and Rome—not only that America has great artists, which they see when they see *them*—but that she has warriors, and statesmen, and jurists; and yet more, that she herself, though a republic, is sometimes a grateful one—who honors patriot citizens with distinctions of voluntary homage, such as in these countries are